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# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS.

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## CRITICISM OF PUBLIC MEN.

"See how differently men reason about public right and wrong as compared with the way they reason about personal right and wrong. We all reproach Machiavelli and his memory, and yet we pardon to rulers the practices we despise in his books."—*Thomas B. Reed.*

THE letters of Junius are the classic, in the English language, of abuse of public men. Modern journalists are discreet, tender and chaste compared with the writer who, as Mr. Lecky says, is chiefly responsible for the fact that anyone remembers the Duke of Grafton as a British statesman. The duke has come down to us as the most abused politician of his time. And no one who reads his Junius with understanding can escape the conviction that the young nobleman who once conducted the king's government was severely used. Our modern rulers should turn to those extraordinary letters and note what his Grace of Grafton had served with his coffee and rolls.

Lecky says that Junius wrote with a malignity that was fiendish. But it is worth noting that the duke was no saint. "A young man of great position, strong passions, weak character," writes the same historian of Grafton. "His notorious indolence, vacillation, and indifference, the contrast between his old friendship for Wilkes and his recent policy, and the careless and undisguised profligacy which led him, on one occasion,—when still prime minister,—to appear publicly at the opera with a well-known courtesan, were all sources of

scandal and weakness." If, therefore, Junius was outrageous, we must admit that the duke had invited outrageous treatment.

It is not proposed to maintain that, in general, the victims of pamphleteers and the press have, in any period, merited the full force of the assaults made upon them. Even with a vein of truth upon which to work, the critics of public men have often exaggerated and distorted the weaknesses or offences they undertook to denounce. This has been true ever since the days of Addison and Swift. We may be sure that even the corruption of Sir Robert Walpole was magnified by the writers for the opposition. Certainly Dr. Johnson never could do justice to the "whig dogs." Thomas Jefferson, in one of his campaigns, had to face charges embodied by a Connecticut clergyman in a sermon, widely circulated for political effect, according to which Jefferson had embezzled trust funds and swindled widows and orphans.

But let us seek the larger facts. Assaults upon the private characters of public men were far more common during the Eighteenth century and the larger part of the Nineteenth than they are in our own time. Speaking in averages, the private character of public men to-day, particularly the private character of statesmen of the first rank, is much higher and purer and sweeter than it was a century or a century and a half ago. Controversy on these points will not be raised by persons who are familiar with history. When the freedom of the press was achieved in England in the Eighteenth century, public life was placed under the glare of criticism and publicity for the first time. The spectacle was far from inspiring. Parliamentary seats were bought and sold on a large scale and the morals of the court and the aristocracy were scandalously loose. Now, what Methodism did not do to revivify and purify the life of the English nation a free press accomplished. Thanks to vituperators like Junius it became unfashionable, and then unpardonable, for a prime minister to appear at the opera with a woman of the town.

Referring to the countries which have democratic institutions somewhat advanced, it must be conceded that the very

license with which the press pursued public men for two centuries has powerfully helped to make high public station impossible to men of loose private life. It might even be asserted that abuse of public men has been the main factor in making impeccable private morals the first necessity to the successful pursuit of public office.

Even Lord Melbourne could not swear in the presence of the youthful queen and it followed, as Mr. Gladstone used to say, that the accession of Victoria drove profanity from the British court. In a somewhat analogous way the rise of the free press has reacted upon the public life of democracies. The preliminary question asked nowadays by political managers is whether the possible candidate carries with him the faintest aroma of scandal. No party willingly enters a popular campaign burdened with the defence of a scandalous private life. Notwithstanding the exaggeration, the libel, the scurrility, which have long accompanied criticism of rulers, public life has been largely purged by this process. Rough it has been and often brutal, perhaps, like a grinding process of nature, yet popular government has been benefited and the net result has been good.

It may be doubted if many realize how important a duty remains in the criticism of public men, after the highest standard of morals affecting private character has been established. The fact that there is a certain double standard of ethics in public life is not so clearly understood as it ought to be. Yet the province of criticism, yes, even the function of abuse which is criticism running amuck, must be interpreted in the light of the actual ethical status of statesmanship. In considering this phase of the question it is necessary to know very clearly that the average morality among a people is far lower than the highest individual morality, that national morality is no higher than the average popular morality, and that international morality, or the average morality of many peoples of varying civilizations, is lower than the best national morality. Statesmen and politicians, however, deal with national and international problems and the consequence is that, at the very best, they are guided in their conduct of public affairs

by the average morality of the forces they handle or confront. So it happens that statesmen of "irreproachable character" often do things, of a public nature, that are indefensible in the code of individual ethics. Bismarck's mutilation of the Ems dispatch in order to precipitate war with France may be regarded as an act of high statesmanship, but it is inconceivable that Bismarck would have forged the signature to a check. His private morality was far above his public morality, and that may be said of public men, in general, the world over.

Have we, after all, advanced so very far beyond Machiavelli's standard for rulers, as stated in the eighteenth chapter of "The Prince"? Let us scrutinize again that celebrated passage:

"How worthy it is in a ruler to keep faith, to practice fair dealing, and not cunning, everybody agrees. Nevertheless, experience in these days teaches us that those rulers have done great things who have made little account of keeping faith, who have had cunning to bewilder men's minds, and that in the end they have overcome those who have based their conduct on honest dealings. . . . A prudent ruler cannot, nor ought he to keep faith, when such fidelity shall turn against him, and the reasons which moved him to make his promises are spent. . . . And a ruler will never lack pretexts to color his breach of faith. Of this I could give numberless examples in our own times, and show how many treaties, how many promises, have been made naught by the faithlessness of rulers; and he who best has played the fox has prospered best. But it is necessary to know well how to conceal this nature, and to be a great deceiver and hypocrite; for men are so simple and yield so readily to the wants of the moment, that he who will trick shall always overcome another who will suffer himself to be tricked. . . . We must recognize this, that a ruler, and especially a new ruler, cannot observe all those things which men deem good; being often obliged, for the welfare of the State, to act contrary to humanity, contrary to charity, contrary to religion. And, besides, he must have a mind ready to shift as the winds and eddies of fortune bid; not to depart from good, if he can help himself, but to know how to do evil, if he must. Therefore a ruler must take great care that no word shall slip from his mouth that shall not be full of piety, trust, humanity, religion and simple faith, and he must appear, to the eye and ear, all compact of these. . . . Let a ruler, then, make the State prosper, and his methods always will be judged honorable, and be praised by all; because the vulgar are always caught by appearance and by the event; and in this world there are none but the vulgar."

It may be confessed that Machiavelli had a certain delightful candor. He was the first great writer on politics who fol-

lowed an inductive method and who boldly drew his conclusions from the facts of the life around him. Having been a public man himself, he knew from experience and observation that in making a distinction between the standards of public and private morality he was but recognizing one of the most fundamental principles of the politics both of his own age and of previous ages. Indeed Professor W. A. Dunning, in his recent essay on the Florentine, has said that Machiavelli's "attitude toward morality and religion was scientifically justifiable"—meaning doubtless that it was solidly based on the facts of mediæval statesmanship. Although Machiavelli's doctrine was bitterly and justly antagonized by the ethical influences that characterized the Reformation, "the practice of the age continued to furnish, like all preceding ages, incontestable evidence that the 'reason of state' took precedence, in political life, of the moral code which was recognized as valid between man and man." And Professor Dunning proceeds to show how Frederick the Great, while denouncing academically the teachings of the Italian, illustrated them in a very distinguished way as the head of a State.

If it be considered wanton to charge that modern statesmanship is not far removed from the Machiavellian stage, then let us observe what is soberly said by men of repute in our own times. We need not go back to Hume, who had a low opinion of the morality of statesmanship, nor to Sir Henry Maine, who wrote that the party leader "is debarred by his position from the full practice of the great virtues of veracity, justice and moral intrepidity." There are more recent utterances to refer to. The late Earl Dufferin, after a lifetime in the diplomatic and administrative service of the British crown, said that "force and not right is still the dominant factor in human affairs." Mr. James Bryce, whose experience in British politics has been extensive and whose knowledge of public affairs in several countries is fully as profound as that of any man of his time, has written of the English that they "have two moralities for public life, the one conventional or ideal, the other actual. The conventional finds expression not merely in the pulpit, but also in the speeches of public men." Mr.

Bryce adds: "The actual morality, as one gathers it in the lobbies of the legislative chambers, or the smoking rooms of the political clubs, or committee rooms at contested elections, is a different affair. It regards (or has till very lately regarded) the bribery of voters as an offence only when detection has followed; it assumes that a minister will use his patronage to strengthen his party or himself; it smiles at election pledges, as the gods smiled at lovers' vows; it defends the abuse of parliamentary rules; it tolerates equivocations or misleading statements, proceeding from an official, even when they have not the excuse of State necessity."

John Fiske, only a short time before his death, in paying a tribute to Huxley's superb honesty and fidelity to truth, was moved to contrast the public man with the scientist:

"A statesman is seldom, if ever, called upon to ascertain and exhibit the fundamental facts of a case without bias and in the disinterested mood which science demands of her votaries. The statesman's business is to accomplish sundry concrete political purposes, and he measures statements primarily, not by their truth, but by their availableness as means toward a practical end."

"Not by their truth!" Yet truth-telling is one of the simplest virtues. Was it singular that the venerable and distinguished scientist, Professor Virchow of Berlin, who had learned politics from long experience in the political field, should have said that "when one knows persons who will bear the responsibility of the world's events before history one is faced by a complete riddle"? The riddle is the very one we are now considering—the double standard of morality among public men.

In his essay on "The Dutch Republic," Frederic Harrison writes of William the Silent that he never had "that native veracity of soul, that absolute transparency and rectitude of purpose which is so singularly rare in statesmen." Why should those qualities be "singularly rare" in statesmen? George Washington, in Mr. Harrison's view, was a marvel,—why? Because of his "unshaken devotion to right, his perfect justice, his transparent truthfulness and lofty sense of right" on the one hand; and, on the other, because his public career as the chief of a State in a great crisis was tarnished by "no

falsehood, no baseness, no outrage, no crime." No one can reflect concerning this language without noting that the shining virtues which Washington possessed as a statesman are not uncommon among ordinary men. All of us are personally acquainted with individuals whose devotion to right, justice, truth, honor, is almost absolute. To tell the truth is no great merit even among schoolboys. To be honest, just and honorable is nothing "singularly rare" among men who stand by the forge or follow the plow. Yet when these primary virtues are displayed by a great statesman in his conduct of public affairs they are considered positively remarkable by his contemporaries and by the writers of historical essays. The humor of this was not lost on Bagehot, who calls attention, in his essay on Sir Robert Peel, to the Duke of Wellington's solemn tribute to Peel's veracity. It was "his most striking characteristic," noted the duke,—who felt that he must bear special witness to it. And Bagehot dryly adds: "Simple people in the country were not a little astonished to hear so strong a eulogy on a man for not telling lies. They were under the impression that people in general did not. But those who have considered the tempting nature of a statesman's pursuits, the secrets of office, the inevitable complications of his personal relations, will not be surprised that many statesmen should be without veracity, or that one should be eulogized for possessing it."

It is so important that the comparatively indifferent morality of statesmanship be understood, that this phase of the subject may be pursued somewhat further. The German philosopher Nietzsche is often dismissed as a madman. "A good war," said he, "sanctifies every cause." Yet Nietzsche has been referred to by a competent writer in *THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS* as really "the spokesman of a point of view that, in a less extreme form, has great influence." The "point of view" is that morality and statesmanship are third cousins. That it has its present-day supporters even in the universities is clear from such articles as have lately been written by the Scotch scholar, Professor Ritchie, and from the remarkable essay on "The Ethics of Expansion" which a



Cornell Professor produced not long ago. The point made by the Professor was simple enough—there is no ethics in expansion, and it appeared that he was glad of it.

Senator Tillman's difficulty is that of many of us. The successor of Calhoun and Hayne has his faults but his candor is unsurpassed. It was he who said in the United States Senate concerning the statesmen he had come in contact with: "I confess I have felt somewhat at a loss how to judge men who in one aspect appeared to be so high and clean and honorable, and in another appeared more or less despicable." When, however, it is well understood that there exists one moral standard for private life and another for public life, the problem is simplified. Only a conception of the double standard can make intelligible Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's emphatic assertion in the House of Commons a few years ago, that in fomenting the Jameson raid and in betraying at the same time the confidence of her majesty's high commissioner, Cecil Rhodes had done nothing "inconsistent with his personal honor." Many excellent people were not a little puzzled and even troubled by Mr. Chamberlain's view. For Mr. Rhodes had been prime minister of Cape Colony at the time he had secretly engineered the attack upon a State with which her majesty's government was at peace. Mr. Chamberlain was not joking. He judged Mr. Rhodes's act as a statesman by a standard entirely different from that by which his acts as a mere citizen would be measured. And, if the two standards be allowed, it follows that Mr. Chamberlain's assertion was true. A "colossus" was quite above so parochial a thing as "personal honor."

We must be able to comprehend that, historically and scientifically considered, the moral standard of statesmanship has necessarily remained rather low. Morality must develop in the individual before it can develop in the mass of individuals; and it cannot attain a high average of excellence among a people until it has asserted its authority in the majority of individual souls. There have always been great moral teachers, like Jesus and Confucius, before there have been triumphant moral codes permeating whole civilizations.

Inasmuch as statesmen have to deal with great masses of men, looking to them for moral support and even for moral guidance, they naturally accept the moral ideals which exude from men in bulk. Nor can it be forgotten that the world has not gone beyond the point where national interests are pre-eminently selfish. Self-interest, in a national sense, is the pole star of a statesman. A whole people never yet has been capable of a deliberate and unmixed self-sacrifice in the interests of another people. Self-sacrifice is a common virtue among individuals, but it has been impossible to a nation, owing to the conditions of its existence. And in dealing with that more or less conscious, intelligent entity called the State, the statesman is necessarily influenced by the moralities inherent in his trade.

What should be the attitude of the critic of public men? And let us first suppose that unsupposable thing—that the perfect critic dwells upon earth. He must meet difficulties even if his criticism be absolutely judicial and fair. If he calls by their right names some of the public acts of a statesman he is liable to be denounced as a vituperator by that statesman's admirers and friends, for when the one attacked is known of all men to be blameless in his private character the inference is swift in the mind of every supporter that his public life must be equally spotless and regulated by a moral standard not less high. Now that public life has reached a stage when a popular leader of the first rank must at least be true to his wife and pay his debts and befriend his poor relations, the critic faces a public which, like Bagehot's "simple-minded" country people, innocently assumes its favorite's whole public career, moral standards and all, to be modeled upon the noblest and sweetest virtues of the fireside. It follows that people who estimate Bismarck by his devotion to his home, or Cecil Rhodes by his gifts to education, or his affection for his friends and his dogs, would resent a perfectly just characterization of the mutilation of the Ems dispatch or of the Jameson raid.

Or suppose that the critic frankly tells the people that a statesman should not be judged by the ethical code that ap-

plies to private life. Whatever happens to stain the great man's public career, the critic, let us assume, should teach the masses that a statesman has a license to pocket his conscience, especially when "national interests" are involved. The facts and the theory as to the double standard of morality, based on the lower ethical development of men in bulk as compared with the highest type of civilized man, could thus be elucidated. Now that might be very "temperate" and "judicial" and "philosophical" as criticism, but what would be the moral effect of such teaching upon the public mind? Is there a citizen of repute and intelligence who would dare to have openly preached to the people of this country the idea that a statesman may rightly do things which would take him into the criminal courts or deprive him of the society of gentlemen if perpetrated in the circle of private life? How long would it be before A, B, and C—practical men who mean well, but not unnecessarily well—would be saying, "Now if that is proper for Bismarck to do, why isn't it proper for me to do?" And "if Cecil Rhodes can do that for the British empire why can't I do it for my own pocket?" However far some may go in defending the dubious acts of nations or statesmen representing nations, they would never risk the moral pollution of the people by openly preaching in the press or on the platform the double standard of private and public morality. They would not dare!

In the light of this analysis, the question as to the function of criticism of public men comes nearer to being answered. The honest critic has no choice, in the interests of public morals, other than to hold public men up to the highest standards of individual morality. He must judge the acts of statesmen and of nations by the same ethical code to which the individual citizen is bound to conform. He can recognize no double standard because one standard is lower than the other, and in morals, as in money, there is a law according to which the baser may drive the better from circulation.

A conclusion like this, you will say, is very fine, but what of the abuse of public men which so abounds in the free press and on the platform? Unfortunately there are no critics,

writing in the white heat of political issues, who are perfectly fair. Perfect critics have never been born; nor are they likely to be born until human kind reaches perfection, when critics, in the course of nature, will disappear because there will be nothing to criticise. It may be said, conversely, that so long as there is anything to criticise the world will never have a perfect critic. Curiously enough, criticism implies not only the possibility of imperfection but the possibility of imperfection in the critic, although there may be critics who would haughtily resent such an assertion. We must deal, therefore, with the melancholy fact that there is no perfect criticism and that there never can be perfect criticism of public men. All of it must be lacking in the attribute of absolute justice.

Yet criticism should not cease on that account. Nor should it be seriously restricted because some of it drops into abuse. For even abuse, or vituperation, has one merit. As censure it is generally based on a high standard of morals. That is to say, if a vituperator charges a public man with lying, he proceeds on the assumption that lying is wrong. The vituperator makes an unjust charge, but, the personal justice of the charge aside, he certainly does hold on high the standard that lying is forbidden to public men. The vituperator maintains no public allegiance to the double standard of morals. Indeed, the more abusive he becomes, the more censoriously insistent is he that the object of his attack should be held strictly to the most advanced code of ethics which controls the acts of the individual in private life. And this is true, whatever the motives of the critic may be in his assaults.

That form of criticism which runs to abuse no one would applaud, for its offences against justice are rightly reprobated. Its relation to the question of criticism, however, is too singular not to command attention. Evidently a natural accompaniment of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, the public abuse of public men, whether by orator or journalist, is preëminently a characteristic of the more democratic countries. In Germany, where the press laws are severe, there is very little of it; in Russia, where the press censorship is absolute, there is none of it.

But we must note the difference between Russia and Germany, on the one hand, and America and England, on the other, in the matter of moral standards as applied to public affairs. There are no great nations within the pale of western civilization whose leading statesmen are less bound by a high code of morals in diplomacy than those of Germany and Russia. And in no other nations of the same rank are the leading statesmen less obliged to justify their acts to the people on high moral grounds. In America and England, however, where criticism is freest and where it passes most readily into abuse, the leading statesmen, more than in any other country, must be guided by lofty ideals in their public acts; at least, they must find a moral justification for those acts satisfactory to the majority of the people, and, so far as possible, to censorious opponents enjoying unrestrained access to the platform and the public prints.

Nothing could be more desirable than that the moral standards by which national and international politics are conducted should conform to the highest moral conceptions of which the human race is capable; and nothing is surer than that the only way by which that can be accomplished is to judge the public acts of statesmen by the best standards of private morality. Criticism, then, must be permitted free play, even if at times it runs to an extreme of censoriousness that works injustice to individuals. All criticism should be sincere and within the bounds of sanity. Vituperation is the weakness of the system much as the spring freshet is the weakness of a great river, yet untrammelled criticism should be prohibited because of vituperation no more than the river should be made to run dry because each year it overflows its banks. Just as the attacks on the private characters of public men have made it impossible for the dukes of Grafton to wield the ruling power in the State, so the sharp, even abusive, criticism of statesmen, on account of their public acts, operates at least to emphasize the ethical basis of politics and to supplant the old double standard of morality with that single standard which men as individuals are bound to regard as the ideal of human conduct. The function of criticism is a part of the

political evolution peculiar to party government and to democracy. Given the free platform and the free press, even with their superlatives, hyperboles and mendacities, and you have one of the most puissant of forces making for righteousness in government.

As for the honest critic of public men, he can never do injury to the State if (adapting somewhat a saying by Huxley) he makes it his aim: "To smite all humbugs, however big; to give a nobler tone to politics; to set an example of toleration for everything but lying; to be indifferent as to whether the work be recognized, so long as it is done."

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## THE ETHICS OF NIETZSCHE AND GUYAU.\*

### I.

Nietzsche has not that supreme originality which he claims for himself. Mix Greek sophistry and Greek scepticism with the naturalism of Hobbes and the monism of Schopenhauer, corrected by Darwin and seasoned with the paradoxes of Rousseau and of Diderot, and the result will be the philosophy of Zarathoustra; although it is apparently advanced, and its form is fascinating to ingenuous youth in search of novelty, it is none the less essentially ancient and reactionary. It is hostile, in every possible sense, to all which we call modern progress. "*Modern*, that is to say false," Nietzsche reiterates in every variety of tone, and he devotes a chapter in his last work to anathematizing "*Modernity*." He fancies himself secure from the tyranny of all those prejudices which emanate from the "herd" or are due to environment; and yet no one more than this singer of the praises of force and of war has gathered

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\*This article will be included in a book, which is to appear soon, entitled "*Nietzsche et l'immoralisme*."